

Though nurtured, protected, monitored, Utah bighorn sheep barely hanging on

By Joseph Bauman
Deseret News environmental specialist

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MOAB — Desert bighorn sheep in Canyonlands National Park are in worse trouble than ever. But a herd newly established in Arches National Park may be hanging on.

Canyonlands is a huge national park, with some areas isolated by natural barriers, so the rare sheep live in several distinct herds.

Bighorns in the park's Maze District seem to be doing all right. But park officials worry about a decline in the Island in the Sky herd, and especially in the Needles District herd.

"In the Needles District, there's been a real down-turn," said Larry Thomas, Canyonlands' chief of resource management. "We think it's a disease, but we've not isolated it to pin down the root cause of it."

In the annual bighorn sheep census, conducted by biologists in aircraft during November, only 19

of the animals showed up in the Needles District. Around 1983, the number seen in the district was above 80, but the population dropped steadily in the past few years.

The most telling statistic is the ratio of lambs per ewe. In 1982, this worked out to 63 lambs per 100 ewes; in 1983, it was 47; in 1984, there were 13; in 1985, 18; in 1986, 9 per 100.

This year there were 11 ewes and no lambs spotted in the Needles District.

"Only one lamb was seen in the last two years," Thomas said.

The herd seems to be reeling under the impact of the suspected disease. "The lambs are what go first, because the adults might get an immunity to the disease, and the lambs come along and it hits them," he said.

"So it's not looking too good."

A virus called P-13 is known to infect the herd, "but we're not positive that is what's killing

them," he said. Five or six different viruses could be the culprit.

However, sheep transplanted to Arches from the Island in the Sky District in Canyonlands "seem to be holding their own. They have a good lamb-ewe ratio there."

On the Island, actually a huge plateau near Moab, researchers found 142 sheep last year. This year they estimate the herd at 119. "So it's dropping," he said. This is the seed herd for transplants to other parts of Utah.

This year's Island in the Sky lamb-ewe ratio was 35 lambs per 100 ewes, he said. "You want 40 or 50 (per 100) if you have a big, expanding herd. Yet 35 per 100 is not bad."

Park Service managers are consulting with biologists for a better idea of what the figures mean.

Shirleen Haas, a Utah State University graduate student, has been researching the adaptation of the bighorns to Arches. They were transplanted to the smaller park from Canyonlands in two

Please see SHEEP on B4

DWR study shows more bighorn in south, fewer in north

The DWR, with assistance from the National Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, has completed its annual study on Utah's bighorn sheep.

Data collected on 448 bighorns show the South Unit has had an increase in numbers with more lambs than last year, while the North Unit shows a drop in population and a significant lamb mortality problem.

The new San Rafael Unit showed a growing and healthy population. More than 80 bighorns were found on the San Rafael, and all indications suggest a growing and expanding herd. Biologists found the herd in the Maze area of Arches National Park doing well, but found the herd in the Needles district of Canyonlands smaller than expected.

Money from the project was provided through annual bidding on desert bighorn hunting permits. The permits sell for between \$20,000 and \$30,000.

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DISABLED SKI EVENT SCHEDULED —

The Snowbird Disabled Ski Program will hold its annual fund raiser Feb. 26-28 at the Snowbird Ski Resort. All proceeds will go toward helping disabled skiers. Involved in the event will be several NFL players.

The event will feature a dinner, dance, ski clinic, ski race and auction. For information call 521-6040, ext. 4088.

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NEW BIG GAME HABITAT — The Utah

Wildlife Resources Division has agreed to purchase the old Elbow Ranch in Mayfield and will use the 3,900 acres for deer and elk habitat, division big game coordinators say.

"We're also going to be improving fisheries in the area," division spokesman Lorin Sperry said. "The ranch has a fairly good reservoir we're going to improve, and a smaller one we're going to rebuild."

The Manning Meadow Reservoir, he said, should provide excellent fishing for central Utah residents. And, once the smaller reservoir, called Barney Lake, is rebuilt, "it will relieve pressure on Manning."

The 3-year purchase contract has been agreed to. The Elbow Ranch had been in fore-

closure several times, he said, before the state entered negotiations to acquire the land.

The division has been able to pick up several large farms recently, he said, because of "the tough economic conditions in agriculture. We're also seeing farmers who have raised their kids and the kids left home, so they're willing to sell to us when they retire."

The division, Sperry said, also is negotiating to buy a 1,100-acre ranch in Cache County, in the Richmond area.

Most of the money used for such purchases comes to the state from a federal excise tax on the purchases of sporting arms and ammunition.

Bighorn sheep to return after livestock move

June 1989

The Bureau of Land Management has announced plans for livestock to be removed from 105,000 acres of public land near the Book Cliffs north of Green River, in Emery County.

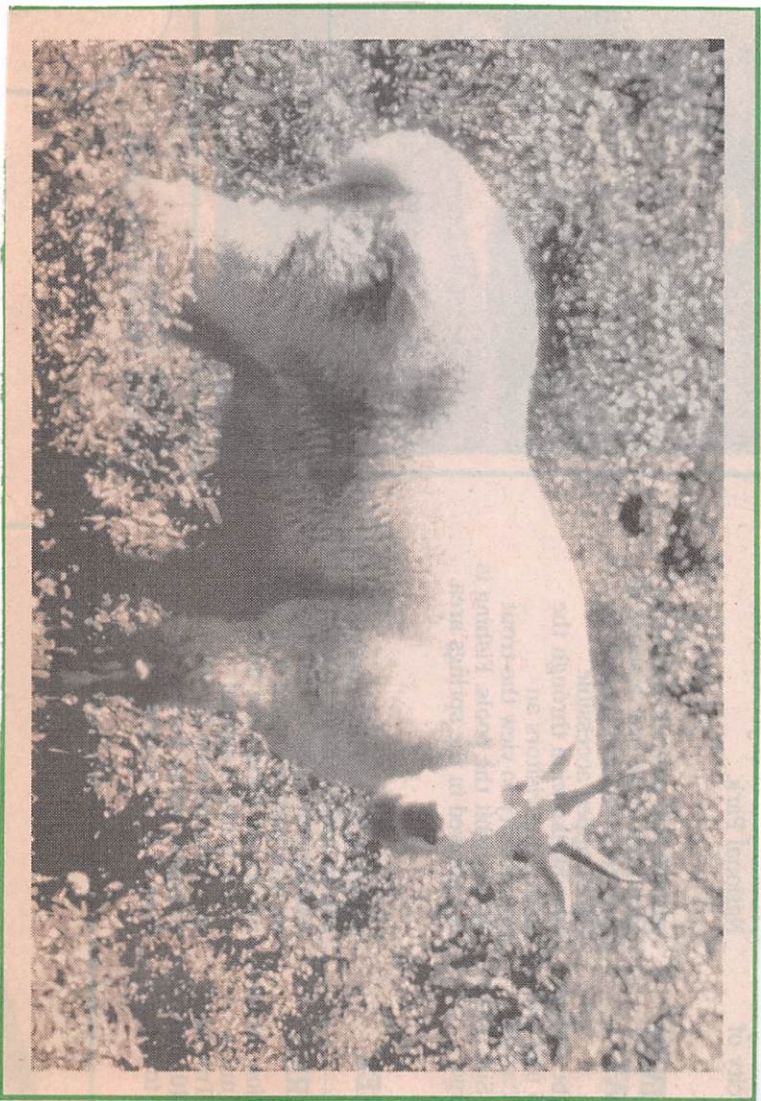
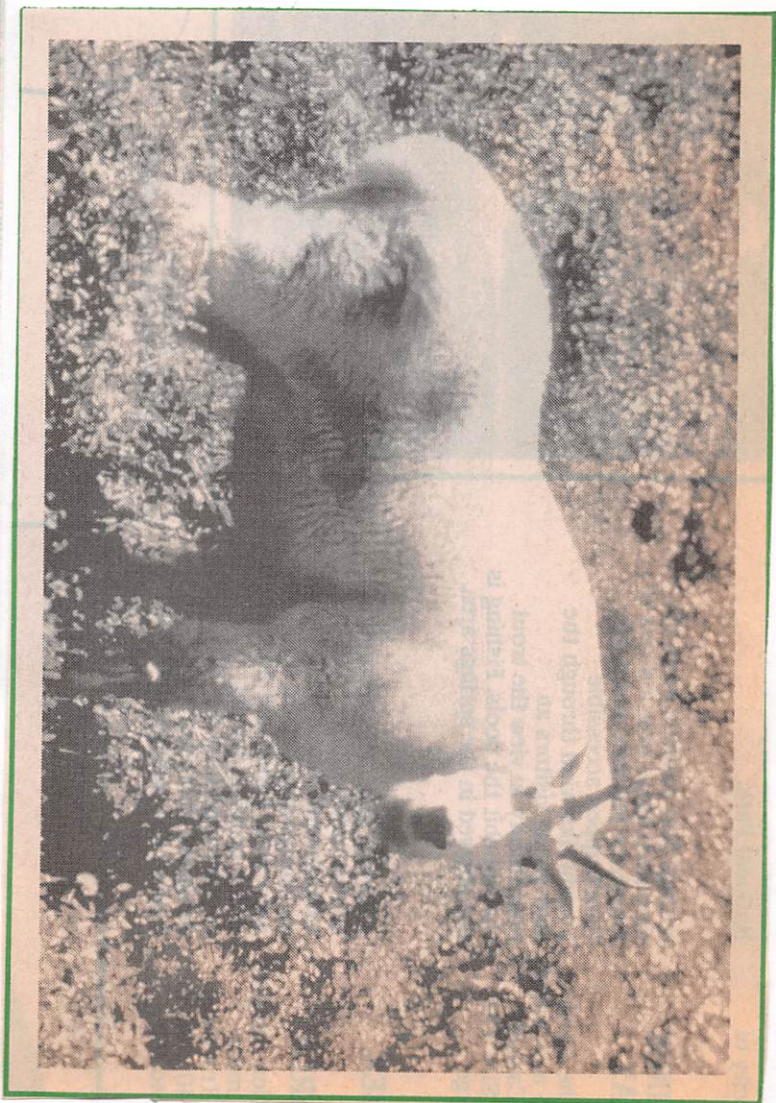
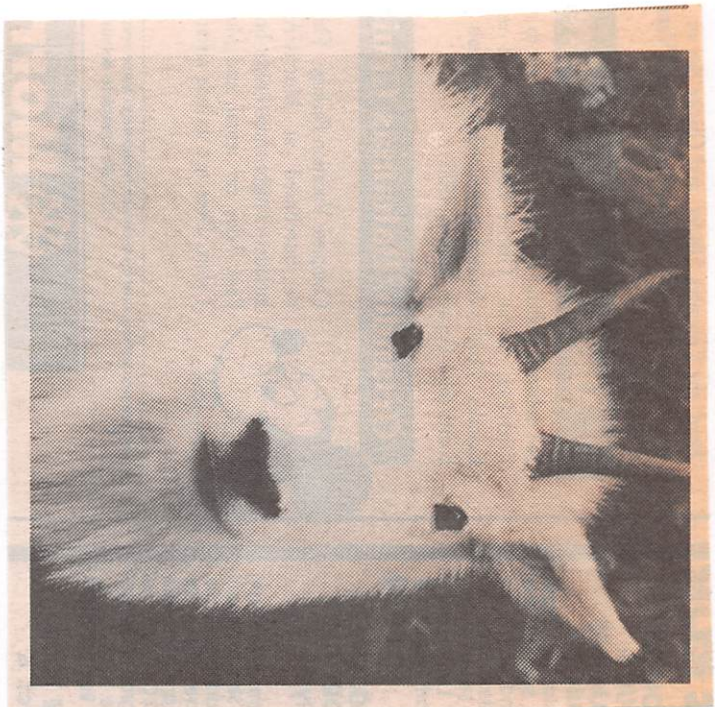
The removal will pave the way for the return of a herd of bighorn sheep. It will also benefit back country recreationists, especially river-runners, by providing better quality

land and by eliminating the competition with livestock for these areas.

Plans for the deal came together when ranchers with grazing permits in the area relinquished their permits. The move was a cooperative effort involving permit-holders, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the BLM, the Utah Wilderness Association, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and the Utah Outdoors

Foundation.

One of the main benefits from removing livestock, such as domestic sheep, from the area is that bighorn sheep will now be able to move in. Domestic sheep carry diseases fatal to bighorns when the two animals come in contact. Bighorn sheep were once numerous in Utah mountains and have only recently been reintroduced.





Bruce Giunta, of the state Division of Wildlife Resources, unloads a kid into Dry Canyon this week. Wildlife personnel spent Wednesday rounding up five goats, a billy, three nannies and a kid for the transplant. The goats were tethered overnight Wednesday in Pica Circle on the back of Mt. Timpanogos then led down to a waiting horse trailer and transported to the canyon. They were given antibiotics, outfitted with a radio transmitter and released.



Herald photo by Rex Infanger

5 goats transplanted to canyon on Provo Peak

By JOHN BEST
Herald Correspondent

It was a treat some mountain goats couldn't refuse.

Recently five Rocky Mountain goats were lured under a large net with a bait of apple mash and salt lick, a treat the goats couldn't refuse.

The large net high on the back side of Mount Timpanogos was tripped, trapping the goats, which are part of a transplant program to Squaw Peak.

By late Thursday afternoon, the goats were roaming around their new home in Dry Canyon below Provo Peak.

This transplant of five goats is in addition to seven goats that were brought to Dry Canyon last August from Olympic National Park in Washington.

Division of Wildlife Resources biologist and project coordinator for the goats projects, Walt Fitzgerald says, last year's goats are doing well and are in the same general area, except for one which wandered to the Uinta Mountains. The goats are tracked by radio transmitting collars. Each goat is also tagged with a numbered ear tag for field identification. This small herd of goats had one young billy, one kid, and three nannies.

Paul Tervort DWR's Central Region Big Game Manager assisted in the transplant program, and said things did not go as planned, but

with some quick maneuvering the transplant worked out.

"We had planned to transport the goats by helicopter from Timpanogos to Squaw Peak. That plan fell through, when we couldn't find an available helicopter anywhere in the state. The brush fires near Vernal and other parts of the state have tied up many of the helicopters. When we found out the helicopter we had coming couldn't make the run, and we couldn't locate another one, we sent riders up the Timpanoosie trail to the Emerald Lake area, with horses to bring the goats down. The goats were tied on the horses like pan-yards, and transported down the mountain."

Tim Garcia, a National Forest Service worker, said as soon as the goats were brought down, they were hosed down with water to cool them off. The goats were then loaded in a horse trailer and quickly transported down the canyon.